

CHESAPEAKE PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting Minutes

December 2, 2021

This meeting of the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board was held on December 2, 2021, at the Dr. Clarence V. Cuffee Community Center. Chair Hoover called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Fuqua called the roll. Attendance reflected a quorum with 12 voting members present and 4 absent.

Members Present:	Catina Bondhill, Donna Cannatella (non-voting ex-officio/CCC), Bryan Carey, Jean Carideo (non-voting ex-officio/GBBWHF), Kevin Cole (non-voting ex-officio/CPS), Susan Dixon, Sandy Emery (non-voting Youth Liaison), Paula Faivre, Berkley Gibbs, Jean Holt, Jennifer Hoover (Chair), Lindy Huber, Bob Leedom (Vice-Chair), Chris Lowie (non-voting ex-officio/GDSNWR), Annette Kelley, Patti McCambridge and Neta Stephens
Members Absent:	Christine Arrasate, Chelsea Hall, Julie Halsnoy and Michael Williams
Staff Present:	Mike Barber, Monica Christiansen, Thurman Diamond, Kim Murden, Shawn Hopson, and Cori Fuqua

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS:

Chair Hoover introduced Dr. Wanda Barnard-Bailey, Deputy City Manager. Dr. Bailey thanked the board for their time and service and said that Parks, Recreation and Tourism will be transitioning from under her purview to another Deputy City Manager, and she introduced Brian Solis who will be heading up the Community Development team which now includes PRT.

MINUTES:

A motion was made by Mr. Carey and seconded by Mr. Leedom to approve the October 7, 2021 minutes as presented. The minutes were unanimously approved by the board. A motion was then made by Mr. Gibbs and seconded by Ms. Holt to approve the November 4, 2021 minutes as presented. The minutes were unanimously approved by the board.

HEARING OF CITIZENS:

Ms. Markiella Moore addressed the board to ask about a pool that was originally planned to be built here at the Cuffee Community Center and she was curious where that would be. Mr. Diamond responded that a pool had been planned for Phase II of the community center and there is plenty of space on the right-hand side of the center to accommodate a 25-meter pool. Referring to the Princeton Halls neighborhood, she heard that the city had a program where they would buy a property for sale in a neighborhood to be able to provide a neighborhood park.

Mr. Barber said that they met with the community civic league about a year ago and the community was going to keep an eye out and let the City know when properties come on the market that could be desirable so the City could investigate possible acquisition and purchase. The City does not normally approach property owners if their property is not for sale.

REPORTS:

a. Ex-Officio Reports:

- **Chesapeake Conference Center** – Ms. Cannatella reported on the following:
 - **Lunch with Chef** on December 10th will feature Toys for Tots. The Conference Center is a drop location for toys. Donors will receive a coupon worth \$4 off Lunch with Chef. For groups of 10 or more, there is a group rate available of \$10 per person. We also have holiday gift certificates available if anyone is interested.
 - **Events and Promotions** – A few events held since the last board meeting were Cigars & Cars, Holiday Craft Show, and City Manager’s Forum. Coming up this weekend is the Exotic Pet Show, then Holiday Brass on December 16th, and lots of holiday parties and other meetings. In February of 2022 will be the Princess Ball, and then the Fishing Flea Market in March.
 - We have an **Event Coordinator** position open so if you know anyone that is interested in applying, send them our way.
 - **HVAC** – Mr. Barber said that he, Ms. Cannatella and Public Works will be meeting with the contractor next week and hopefully they will have some concise timelines for getting the HVAC work done to report next month.
- **Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge** – Mr. Lowie gave the following updates:
 - **Historical Village** - Met with Mr. Barber and staff earlier this week for a discussion about possibly partnering with the department on the historic village. They discussed preliminary topics such as environmental programs, staffing, etc.
 - **Bird Festival** – Scheduled for the last weekend of April 2022 and are hopeful that some activities can be planned for next year.
- **Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Museum** – Ms. Carideo gave the following updates:
 - **Events** –
 - **Historic Candlelight Ghost Tour** sold out with two tours of thirty people each. It was difficult to turn people away- there is definitely a market for this.
 - **Halloween at the Museum** brought in over one hundred museum visitors in one day.
 - **Battle of Great Bridge** reenactment is this weekend (December 4th and 5th) at Battlefield Park South.
 - **SAR/DAR ceremony** is Saturday, December 4th

- **Christmas Past & Present Celebration and Bake Sale** on December 11th from 10am-4pm at the museum. These are not your ordinary cakes and cookies, they're by award winning bakers and they sell out very quickly.
 - **Education** – Elizabeth Goodwin, Executive Director, had two great meetings with Chesapeake Public School staff regarding education - one with the Chief Academic Officer and the other with the Social Studies Supervisor. Both were given tours of the museum and discussed ways the museum can partner.
 - **Great Bridge Battlefield Park**
 - **Volunteers** - Three Navy Chief's Crews worked in the park in October and early November placing mulch along the nature trails and around the Outdoor Classroom, trimming overgrowth and replacing a foot bridge along the berm trail.
 - **Donation** - We have someone who wants to donate a cannon for the park. There is some question as to whether it is correct for the period and whether this is feasible due to size and maintenance. It might be post-revolutionary period, due to its casting style. Ms. Goodwin will contact the Civil War groups who might be interested, and Mr. Barber has been made aware and said there may be a spot in another city historical park. We are all keeping in mind possible upkeep, weight of the cannon on its pedestal and safety considerations.
 - **Chesapeake Public Schools** – Mr. Cole thanked Mr. Barber and Stephanie Miller for hosting the middle school softball tournament at Deep Creek Park.
- b. **Tourism Report** – Ms. Murden gave the following updates:
- **Hotel Performance and Occupancy** – Chesapeake is still doing very well in these areas. In October we were at 74.6% occupancy and the national average was 62.9%, state average of 64% and regional average of 61%. Our average daily rate continues to grow which is good news, and hotels continue to report an increase in leisure travel.
 - **'Peake Holiday** section on the Visit Chesapeake website is geared towards “day trippers”, family/friends visiting during the holidays, and anyone looking for fun things to do. Includes activities, shopping, places to stay, events and even fun facts and crafts.
 - **Visitor Center** – We have a wonderful 2021 Chesapeake Christmas ornament for sale and it's a beautiful piece of artwork inspired by the City's symbol, the blue heron. We are also adding a “Made in Chesapeake” section in the Visitor Center which will feature an assortment of items produced by locals, and we also have books about Chesapeake written by Chesapeake authors.
 - **Sales** – Person-to-person sales activities are on the upswing. In November we had a team at the Nursing Alliance conference in Virginia Beach and made some great contacts. In January the Southeast Tourism Society will be hosting a marketplace in Virginia Beach which works with tour operators as well as a media marketplace for travel writers.
- c. **Parks and Recreation Reports**

- **Parks and Municipal Grounds** – Mr. Hopson said that although mowing has slowed down, cleanup of leaves and pruning of trees have commenced; staff is still supporting events and athletics; starting winter projects such as replacing rusted trash cans, deck boards, painting, and other maintenance and repairs; mulching; playground inspections; stump grinding and other tree work.
- **Recreation** – Mr. Diamond reported that basketball season is underway with practices beginning next week and games starting in January. We have over a thousand participants which is not as many as we usually have but we're glad to see that people are coming back out. We're doing well with youth programs at the centers, and seniors are signing up for the holiday luncheon on December 17th at the Conference Center. And we are still looking to hire housekeeping staff so if you know anyone, please send them to us.
- **Events** – Ms. Christiansen relayed the following upcoming City events: Battle of Great Bridge on December 4th and 5th (reenactment site and encampments at Battlefield Park South), Deck the Hall drive-through light show at City Hall ongoing nightly through January 2nd, Fa La La Land at City Hall on December 11th and 18th from 5-9 pm, and Holiday Brass at the Conference Center on December 16th at 7 pm.

d. **Director Updates and Department Reports:**

- Mr. Barber gave the following updates:
 - **NWRP** – The restrooms at the south terminal have been completed and are open. We're getting close to finalizing a conceptual design for the ranger building/interpretive center and should have some drawings to be able to share in the spring. We hope to get it out for bid in the summer.
 - **Arboretum** – We are going to have to move forward in two stages. First, we have to actually lift the building by 18" to create some crawl space underneath and that will help us get better pricing later on down the road because the contractor will be able to see what they're dealing with for the foundation and flooring when going to stage two renovations. That should be out for bid in early 2022.
 - **Historical Village** – We expect the architectural task order to go out mid-December so we hopefully we may have an architect on board in late January.
 - **Newton Neck Property** – Hopefully the property should be dedicated to the city in the spring and then meeting with citizens to discuss development, connectivity, etc. can begin.
 - **Lighting Projects** – New LED lights were installed at one of the soccer/multipurpose fields at Deep Creek Park, and two are going up at Centerville Park next week.
 - **Paramont Baseball Field** – We received Community Block Grant funding and will be doing a total rebuild of the field which is located on Military Highway and Paramont Avenue by Indian River Park. It will include all new fencing, buildings, and lighting.

- **Deep Creek Park** – The vendor has been secured to do the next round of paving in the back parking lot and it should be completed in the spring.
- **Staffing** – Although we are still understaffed by around 40-50% vacancy overall, our staff really does care, and they go above and beyond consistently to offer excellent customer service.
- **Operating Budget** at 97.5% was submitted before Thanksgiving, and we feel pretty good about it.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- **2022 Officer Election** – Ms. Holt presented the slate from the nominating committee which is Bob Leedom for Chair and Annette Kelley for Vice Chair. There were no other nominations from the floor so both candidates ran unopposed. Mr. Gibbs made a motion to approve the slate as is and was seconded by Ms. McCambridge. The two candidates were elected unanimously by the voting members.

HEARING OF BOARD MEMBERS:

- Ms. Dixon thanked Tourism for adding the Messiah concert to their calendar. They had over 500 people attend, and 65 choral members!
- Mr. Leedom brought in the Virginian Pilot article on the Civil War mystery fort with Mr. Barber and Jessica Cosmas on the front page.
- Ms. Kelley attended the Craft Show and said it was awesome. She was asked by a citizen to find out if there could be more parking available for trailers at Great Bridge Lock Park. Twice during the middle of the week, the parking lot was completely full. Ms. Christiansen and Mr. Barber said that the parking lot was paved a couple of years ago and there is now more parking available than there used to be. It's open 24/7 for public use but little area remains for expansion of parking.
- Ms. Faivre asked about the meeting schedule for the board for next year. Ms. Fuqua and Mr. Diamond are finalizing it and it should be sent out shortly. She then asked again about Phase II for Deep Creek Park. Mr. Barber said that Phase II is still on the CIP request list, but funding has not been approved for it at this time due to other priorities.
- Ms. McCambridge said that the City Treasurer thinks the lights at City Hall are beautiful and has mentioned that to everyone in her office. Regarding the Civil War mystery fort, has there been any thought on what that could look like and are there any plans to do something with that site? Mr. Barber said that the current conceptual plan is to put in a parking lot, interpretive signage and build some replicas within the fort. It would be great if it could be opened up visually to the water because that would help to tell the story more comprehensively. There are many different theories and interpretations of the history of the site so the interpretive signage will be a challenge.
- Mr. Gibbs thanked Ms. Christiansen for speaking at the Kiwanis club meeting yesterday and she did a great job.

- Ms. Hoover drove by City Hall and said the lights look amazing. She has enjoyed being a part of the board for the last few years and thanked the department for their great work.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Barber presented Certificates of Appreciation to Mr. Gibbs and Ms. Hoover for their participation and service on the board, and Mr. Gibbs presented Mr. Barber with a “turf repair kit” for City Park for after the Jubilee.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be on Thursday, January 6, 2022, at 6:30 pm at the Chesapeake Conference Center, 700 Conference Center Drive.

Minutes submitted by Cori Fuqua, Secretary